

## Chief Editor's Message

### Sri Lanka Journal of Development Administration (SLJDA)

It is with great pleasure that I present this volume of the *Sri Lanka Journal of Development Administration (SLJDA)*, published by the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration. The journal is devoted to scholarly inquiry in administrative, economic, management, development, social, and political disciplines. In keeping with its multidisciplinary orientation, this volume features nine rigorously reviewed articles that offer contemporary perspectives from both scholars and practitioners in public management. Collectively, these contributions enrich the evolving discourse on governance, institutional reform, digital transformation, social equity, and public service delivery in Sri Lanka and beyond.

In the domain of social security, **Mr. Weerasingha** addresses sustainability concerns in “*Why Do People Drop Out of the Contributory Pension Programme in Sri Lanka?*” Drawing on qualitative interviews, the study identifies financial hardship, perceived benefit inadequacy, limited trust, and insufficient awareness as key drivers of dropout. The paper recommends policy reforms to strengthen transparency, align contributions with income realities, and rebuild public confidence.

Expanding the regional and technological scope, **Mr. Perera and Ms. Jayavindi** present “*A Critical Review of Advancing Inclusive Education in South Asia through Universal Design for Learning and Human-Centered AI.*” This critical review argues that integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with Human-Centered AI (HCAI) offers promising pathways to inclusive education. However, infrastructure gaps, digital literacy disparities, and teacher preparedness remain significant challenges requiring systemic intervention.

**Dr. Mudalige** explores service quality and decentralization in “*The Nexus of Public Satisfaction and Administrative Decentralization: The Case of Siyambalanduwa Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka.*” Using the SERVQUAL framework, the study finds generally neutral satisfaction levels under normal conditions, but heightened appreciation during the

COVID-19 crisis, particularly for grassroots service delivery through Grama Niladharis and other frontline officials. The findings underscore the importance of responsive local governance in times of crisis.

Exploring migration and empowerment, **Ms. Amarasekara and Dr. Arandara** examine the socio-economic and political transformation of Sri Lankan women return migrants in “*Did International Migration Change Women’s Lives? Examining the Empowerment Status of Sri Lankan Women Migrants.*” Based on field data from the Badulla District, the study reveals improvements in social and political empowerment, while raising concerns regarding the sustainability of economic gains. The findings call for progressive policy interventions to nurture long-term empowerment outcomes.

The featured article by **Mr. Papakaran** examines the pressing need for horizontal integration in Sri Lanka’s digital governance landscape. In “*Strengthening Digital Governance in Sri Lanka: Towards Horizontal Integration and Institutional Reform in the Public Sector,*” the author critically evaluates institutional, legislative, and technological constraints that impede coordinated digital transformation. Drawing lessons from global models such as Estonia’s X-Road and India’s Aadhaar system, the study proposes a Digital Interoperability Act, a central digital authority, and unified API frameworks to achieve an integrated, citizen-centered public sector.

In “*The Impact of E-Government on Street-Level Bureaucracy: A Literature Review,*” **Ms. Liyanage** synthesizes global scholarship on how digital technologies reshape the roles of frontline public officials. The review identifies three theoretical perspectives - enablement, curtailment, and continuation - demonstrating that digitalization can both enhance and constrain bureaucratic discretion. Importantly, the study calls for more context-sensitive research within the Global South.

Addressing emerging digital-era challenges, **Mr. Bopagamage** contributes “*Safeguarding Children’s Rights in the Digital Age: A Comparative Study of Sri Lanka, the EU, and the USA.*” Through doctrinal legal analysis, the study identifies regulatory gaps in Sri Lanka’s child protection framework and advocates for a dedicated Online Child Protection Act, strengthened data protection measures, and child-centered digital policies to ensure safe and empowering online environments.

In “*Employees’ Perceptions of the Existing Performance Appraisal System: A Study of Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS) Officers,*” **Ms. Priyadarshani** investigates the acceptability of evaluation ratings within the current performance appraisal system. Using survey data from SLAS Grade III and II officers, the study finds that perceived issues related to raters significantly reduce acceptance of appraisal outcomes, whereas the design of the appraisal system itself is statistically insignificant. The research highlights the need for reforms focused on supervisory practices to enhance fairness and credibility.

Finally, **Ms. Thavarajah**, in “*Governance, Accountability, and Public Trust: A Longitudinal Analysis of Sri Lanka’s Governance Performance (1996–2023),*” presents a comprehensive analysis based on Worldwide Governance Indicators. The study reveals a persistent deficit in public trust, closely associated with weaknesses in voice and accountability and control of corruption. By situating governance within Sri Lanka’s post-conflict and crisis context, the paper underscores the importance of transparent and responsive institutions in restoring democratic legitimacy.

Together, the articles in this volume reflect the intellectual diversity and practical relevance that define the *Sri Lanka Journal of Development Administration*. They engage critically with pressing issues - digital governance, accountability, performance management, social protection, gender empowerment, child rights, inclusive education, and decentralized service delivery - while offering policy-relevant insights grounded in empirical and comparative analysis.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all authors, reviewers, and the editorial team whose dedication has ensured the academic rigor and timely publication of this volume. We hope that this issue will stimulate informed debate, encourage further research, and contribute meaningfully to strengthening governance and public administration in Sri Lanka and the broader region.

**Emeritus Professor W. Indralal De Silva**

Chief Editor

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